Changing lives: living the dream at the Livingstone



Growing up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lila Ruhurimbere learned about Scottish explorer David Livingstone but never imagined that she would not only visit his birthplace, but also actually work there.

Now that has become a reality, thanks to getting involved in a museum apprenticeship for people from ethnic minorities, a project made possible by HLF.

“I have always had enthusiasm for heritage, museums and arts in Scotland,” says Lila, 34, who has lived in Glasgow for the past 12 years. “But my lack of experience or required graduate qualification had been a barrier for me. I come from a low income ethnic minority and African background in Scotland where going to museums wasn’t really an option.”

All that changed thanks to her involvement with Glasgow-based Next Step Initiative, an organisation working with Scotland’s African communities. She saw details of the museum apprenticeships being offered as part of a new project.

“This is an opportunity for me to build on my dream as it provides that basic start and foundation which is very crucial for me,” says Lila. “It has given me the opportunity to learn new skills and acquire practical experience in the workplace.” Having previously completed an HND in business studies she had applied for several jobs but was unsuccessful as she had never yet worked in the UK.

Working at the David Livingstone Centre

Now, having been accepted on a one-year apprenticeship with the National Trust for Scotland, she was placed at the David Livingstone Centre at Blantyre - the museum based in the explorer's birthplace.

Beginning last August, the apprenticeship, with on-the-job training, has involved a wide range of work. She has been responsible for opening and closing the museum, as well as meeting and greeting visitors. Lila talks about walking along with them to answer questions and explain part of the David Livingstone story, and generally making them feel at ease.

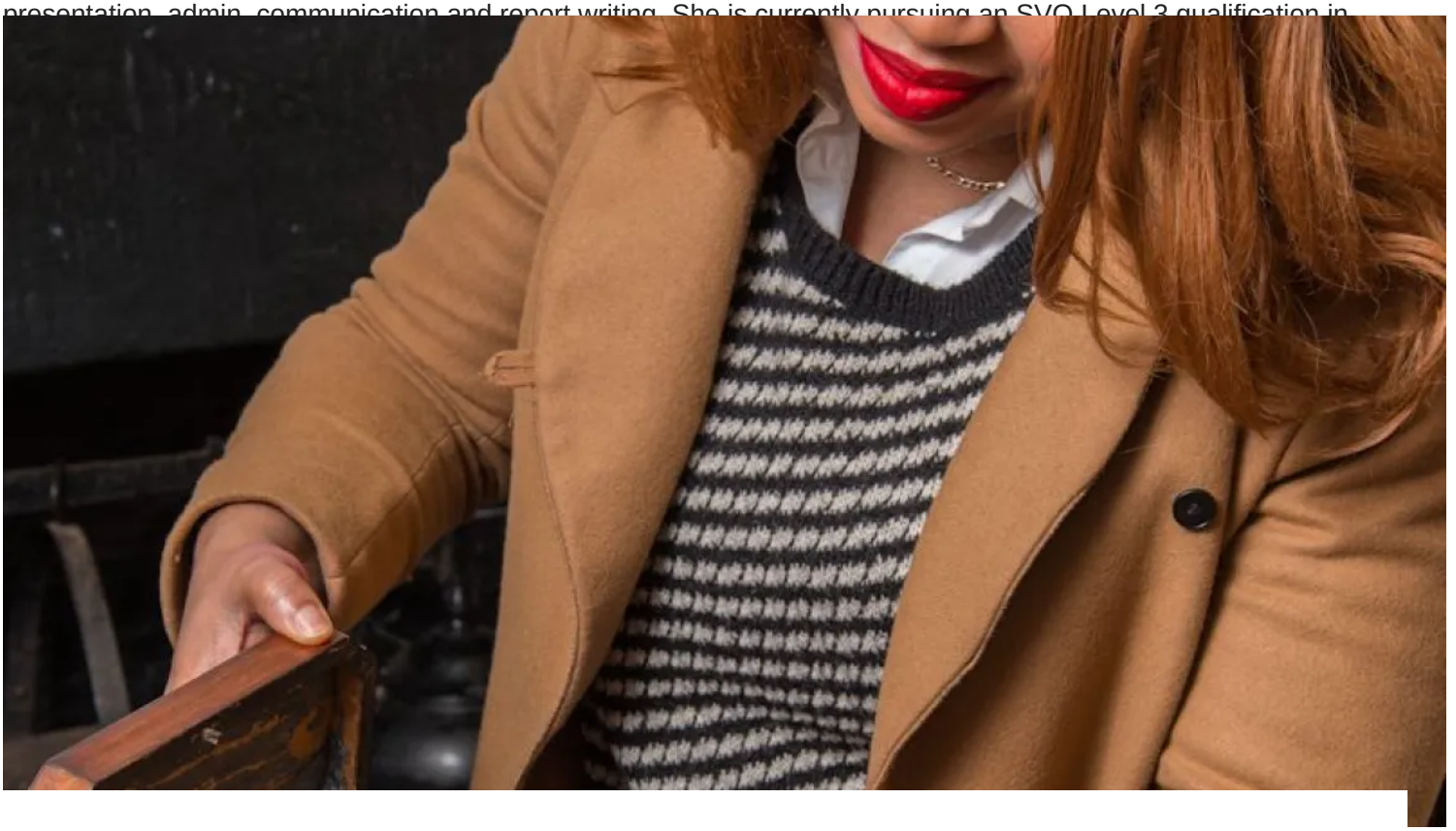
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>
> - Lila

She has organised a guided tour aimed at visitors from among Glasgow's African communities. "We had people from different countries of Africa, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Sudan and Kenya," she explains. Other tasks have included organising special events for families and also taking a full part in researching the David Livingstone Trust Papers so as to create a full inventory of the museum's collection tracking down the provenance of the many artefacts - something that will continue while the Centre is closed for refurbishment.

Lila is full of praise for the project and the opportunity it has given her. "Thanks to the National Lottery I'm learning a lot about Scotland's heritage and history which is helping me integrate more into Scottish society," she says, adding: "Since I have started my apprenticeship I have been going to touristic places that I have never been to before … I have a feeling of discovering Scotland now which is an amazing experience and I am really enjoying it."

Looking forward to the future

The work at the David Livingstone Centre has also boosted her self-confidence and helped her learn new skills covering presentation, admin, communication and report writing. She is currently pursuing an SVQ Level 3 qualification in



Lila with David Livingstone's tea caddy Colin McLean